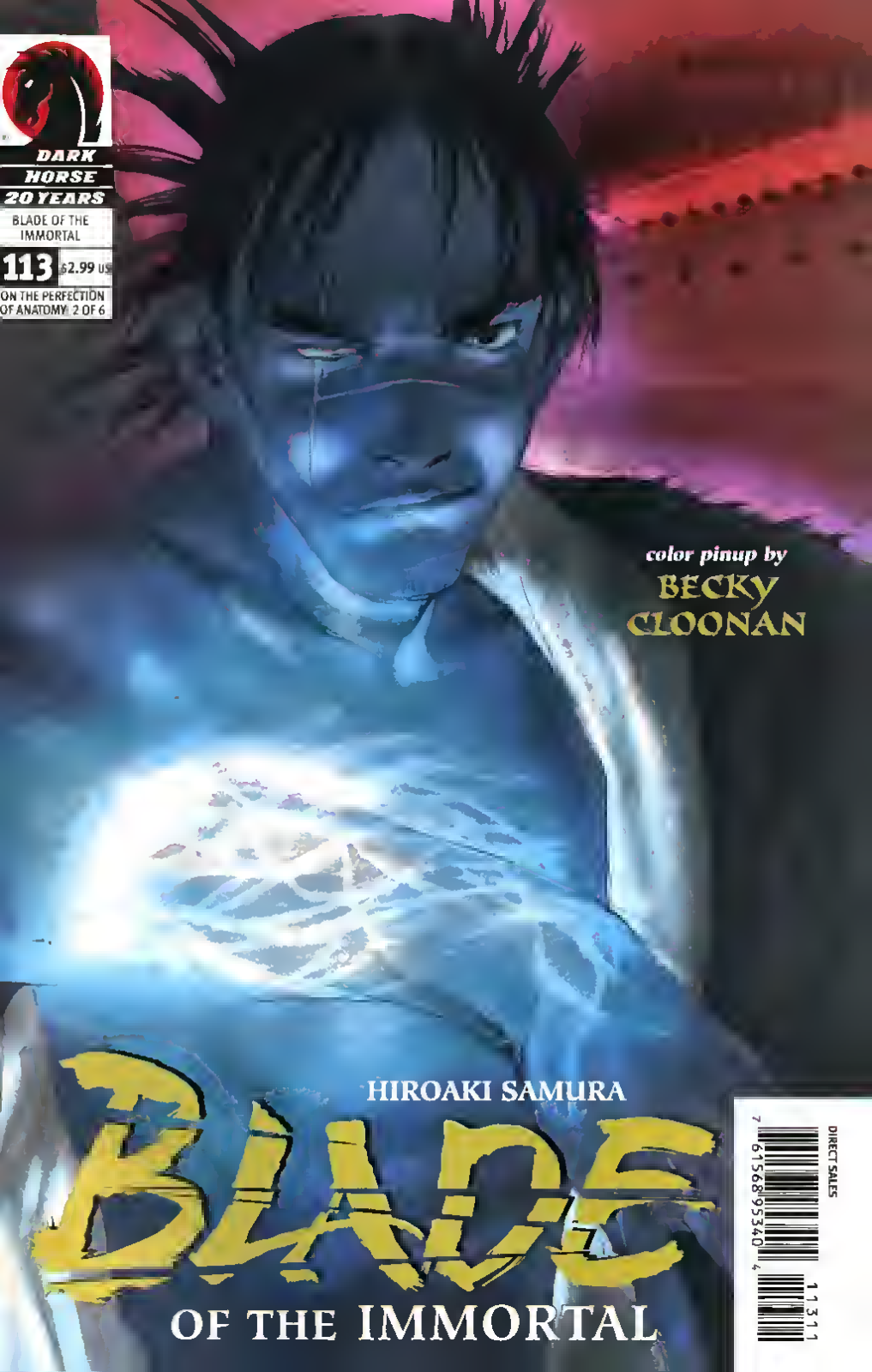
DARK HORSE 20 YEARS
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
113
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ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY: 2 OF 6
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

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cover colors by DAN JACKSON

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, serving the Shogun and seeking the secret of immortality

BURANDO

Deranged medical examiner saved from prison by Kagimura

DEWANOSUKE

Manji's cellmate, a simple man imprisoned for theft and arson

YAMADA ASAEMON

Nicknamed "Kubikiri Asa," the Shogun's executioner is an expert sword tester and a limb-cutting connoisseur

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Lured to Kagimura's *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle, Manji is ambushed, overwhelmed, and imprisoned in an underground cell. Seeking to impart the powers of the *kessen-chu* to another human, Kagimura orders his medical examiners to discover the secrets of Manji's regenerative abilities. The first doctor fails miserably and has a nervous breakdown. Kagimura's second doctor, Ayame Burando, seems to make better progress and successfully transfers a limb from Manji to Dewanosuke. Answering Burando's request for special help, Kagimura arranges for Yamada Asaemon's assistance, hoping that his uncanny skills will accelerate the pace of these twisted experiments.

designer DEBRA BAILEY editor PHILIP SIMON

publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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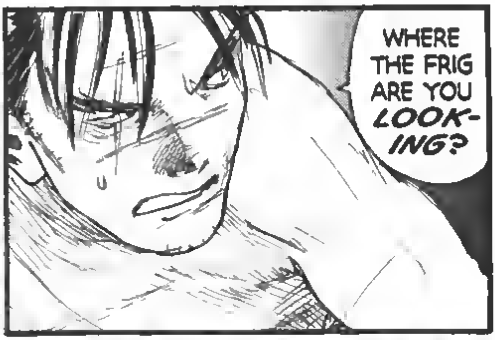
無限の住人

ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY

-part two-

"KAIZO SHIGI
"ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY
"BY AYAME BURANDO
"MY FIRST SURGERY WITH YAMADA ASAEMON YOSHIHIRO-DONO'S AID IS TODAY.
"TODAY'S PROCEDURES: FIRST, AMPUTATE THE LEFT ARMS BELOW THE ELBOW, SWITCH, AND SUTURE..."
...HM.
I KNOW I RANTED AT DEWA-NOSUKE THE OTHER DAY, BUT...

"...TO SEE MANJI...
"...HIS HEAD BOWED AS IF AWAITING EXECUTION, ENTRUSTING HIS BODY TO THE BLADE... IT IS A DISTURBING SIGHT."


WHERE THE FRIG ARE YOU LOOK-ING?

"...AFTER THE SWORD'S LIGHTNING FLASH, I INSPECT THE REVEALED NERVES, ULNA, AND RADIUS OF THE IMMORTAL'S LOWER LEFT ARM..."

KEEP HIS HEAD UP!
YAMADA-DONO... WHAT'S THAT?
RANKINGS. FOR THE TWO SWORDS I USED.
...IDENTICAL CUTS, PERFECT BENCH-MARKS.
JUST LIMBS, YOU KNOW, AND YET...
BY THE WAY...

...CAN'T DO THAT AT AN EXECUTION.
THE FELONS DO SQUIRM SO.
AH...
"AND TODAY...
"...I RESTORED THE RIGHT ARMS WITHOUT COMPLICATION.
"MANJI'S, I EXPECTED... BUT DEWANOSUKE'S?!
"I HAD HOPED, YES, YET STILL I WAS AMAZED TO SEE HIS FINGERS MOVE A MERE HOUR AFTER SUTURING!
"COULD ONE REJOIN A NORMAL PERSON'S ARM, IT WOULD NEVER FUNCTION AGAIN.
"AND YET...YET! BOTH OF THEM DID SO EASILY! THIS STUNNING, TERRIFYING POWER.
"TO REVIEW DEWANOSUKE'S BODY...
"...HIS LEFT ARM IS MANJI'S.
"HIS RIGHT ARM...
"...IS HIS OWN, INVESTED WITH MANJI'S IMMORTALITY.

"ALL PROCEEDS WITH UNTOWARD EASE, BUT A VITAL QUESTION LINGERS.
"WILL DEWANOSUKE'S RIGHT ARM LOSE ITS IMMORTALITY OVER TIME?
"THIS, IN TRUTH, IS THE VERY KEY UPON WHICH MY FUTURE STUDIES DEPEND.
"AS REGARDS MANJI...
"...HE RETURNS TO NORMAL SIMPLY BY PRESSING DEWANOSUKE'S LIMB AGAINST HIS OWN.
"NO NEED FOR BANDAGES!"
....
....
"EACH OPERATION LEAVES DEWANOSUKE DRAINED. YET THIS MAN...?
"INCREASE HIS FOOD INTAKE, AND YOU CAN SEE HIS VITALITY RETURN.
"SUCH PROFLIGATE RECOVERY!

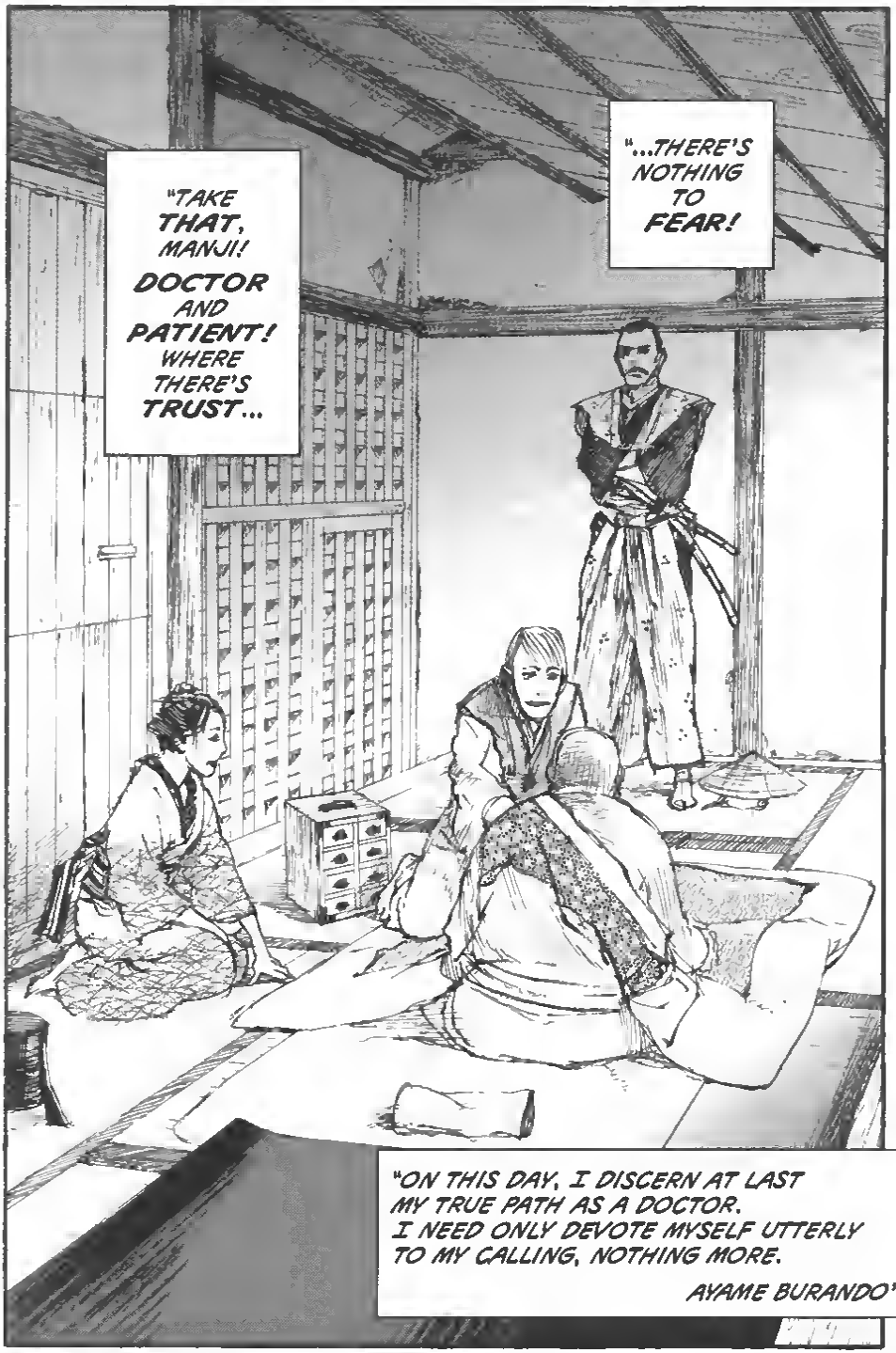
"HABAKI-DONO TOLD ME...
"...THAT AN 'OLD CRONE' GAVE HIM HIS POWER."
HOW I LONG TO MEET HER!
THIS "CURE" IS LIKE NONE KNOWN TO OUR PHYSIC.
"IS SHE GOD?
"OR THE DEVIL?"
I DON'T MIND GET CUTTING UP...?
HEH HEH... YEAH, MAYBE THAT'S TRUE.
LATELY, I GOTTA ADMIT...
...YOU'VE BEEN TRYING STUFF I'D NEVER SEE JUST DUEL-ING.

BUT DOC-- A WORD TO THE *WISE*.
LIKE, JUST HOW MONSTROUS *IS* THIS BOD OF MINE?
AND TO TELL THE TRUTH, I'M JUST A TAD *CURIOUS*.
BY SOME CRAZY CHANCE YOU *DO* GIVE SOMEONE A BODY LIKE MINE?
NEXT THING, YOU'LL BE TREATING *YOURSELF*, DOC. THAT'S WHAT I SAY.
SOMEDAY THEY BRING YOU A *GONER*, RIGHT?
A *HOPE-LESS* CASE... AND YOU *SAVE HIM* BY CHANGING HIS FLESH.
WELL, HELL. SURE HE'LL THANK YOU *AT FIRST*, BUT YOU WAIT.
A FEW YEARS ON, HE'LL *RUN YOU THROUGH!*
HE'LL SCREAM, "*WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?!*" YOU *HEAR* ME, DOC?! IT'LL *HAPPEN*, I SWEAR!

"STUFF AND NON-SENSE!"
SNORE
D-DOC, DID YA SEE...?
DEWA-NOSUKE!

WE FINALLY DID IT! LOOK...
...WHICH ARM IS HEAL-ING?
YOUR ARM... YOUR OWN ARM DID THAT! NOBODY ELSE'S!
.....
.....
OH, MY...
...GOD... THANK GOD.
IT'S ALL I'VE WORRIED ABOUT FOR THREE DAYS...

SENSEI...
IT'S OKAY NOW. THE IMMORTALITY STAYS... EVERY-THING'S OKAY.
...GETTING PAST THIS POINT.
...UNTIL JUST NOW... I'VE BEEN SCARED.
NOT JUST ABOUT MY ARMS, BUT, LIKE, ABOUT YOU FOR-GETTING YOU'RE A DOCTOR.
A BODY THAT DON'T DIE? CAN I REALLY HAVE THAT?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
OF COURSE YOU CAN!
JUST SO LONG AS YOU TRUST ME.
BUT, DOC... I TAKE IT BACK. YOU'RE ONE AMAZING DOCTOR...
...THAT'S FOR SURE.


"TAKE THAT, MANJI! DOCTOR AND PATIENT! WHERE THERE'S TRUST...
"...THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR!
"ON THIS DAY, I DISCERN AT LAST MY TRUE PATH AS A DOCTOR. I NEED ONLY DEVOTE MYSELF UTTERLY TO MY CALLING, NOTHING MORE.
AYAME BURANDO"

I DOUBT YOU FORGOT. IT'S YOUR EIGHTH DAY.
BY THE WAY, BURANDO.
....
....
....
.....
.....
.....
...WELL.
GET A NEW MAN NOW? HE'D BE LOST.
SO I ALLOW YOU TO CONTINUE.
THANK YOU, SIR!!

TORAEMON, WE'RE OUT OF COAGULENT.
Y-YES, SIR! RIGHT AWAY!

YOUNG BURAN-DO.

WHAT YOU DID TODAY...?
IS THAT AN... EXPERI-MENT?
TO REATTACH LIMBS?

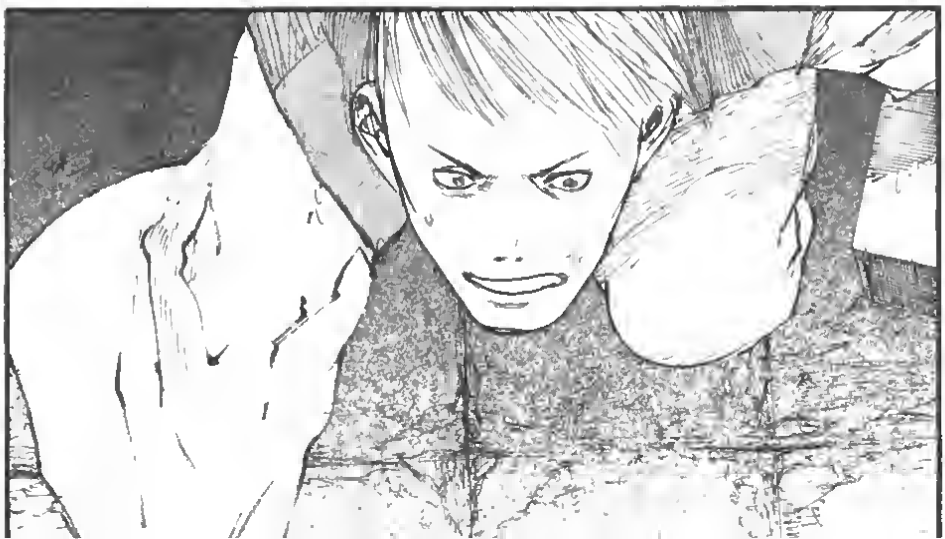
UH, YES, SIR...
THAT'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING EVERY-DAY ?
I SEE, I SEE.

IF PEOPLE LIKE ME MAKE A LIVING CUTTING PEOPLE APART...
...THEN SOMEONE LIKE YOU APPEARS TO PUT THEM BACK TO-GETHER.
EH?
IT'S JUST LIKE... LIFE!!
BUT YOU MUST BE CAREFUL, YOUNG BURANDO.
MAN IS MOST FRAGILE WHEN ALL IS GOING WELL. A SINGLE FAILURE...?
AND SO... REASSEM-BLING THE PIECES.
I INSIST ON HELPING YOUR RESEARCH.
I'M, UH... HONORED, SIR, BUT IS THERE...?
MM!
SO I CAN USE IKIDŌ!

MM! IN TAMESHI-GIRI WE LAY BEHEADED CORPSES ON THE STAND.
I CUT UP A BUNCH, YES? TO JUDGE THE CUTTING EDGE.
LIVE... TORSOS?
BUT SWORDS WERE MADE TO CUT THE LIVING...
...IF WE PURSUE REALISM...
AH HAH HAH...
I SEE... CUCKOO. CUCKOO.
UH... NO ONE SUGGESTED THAT...
I'M NOT A WOLF STARVED FOR BLOOD.
YOUNG BURANDO.

"ON THE TENTH DAY, I HOLD THE FOURTH OPERATION.
"THREE DAYS LATER...

"...DEWA-NOSUKE'S BODY REBELS."



O-KEI!
HOW IS HE?!
OH, SEN-SEI!
THE FEVER WON'T GO DOWN!
:hanf:
:hahh:
:ahff:
:hahh:
APPETITE?
HE JUST THROWS UP. EVEN RICE GRUEL.
THE EARLIER SUR-GERIES?
THREE DAYS' SLEEP AND HE WAS FINE. NOW, IT'S LIKE THIS ALL THE TIME.

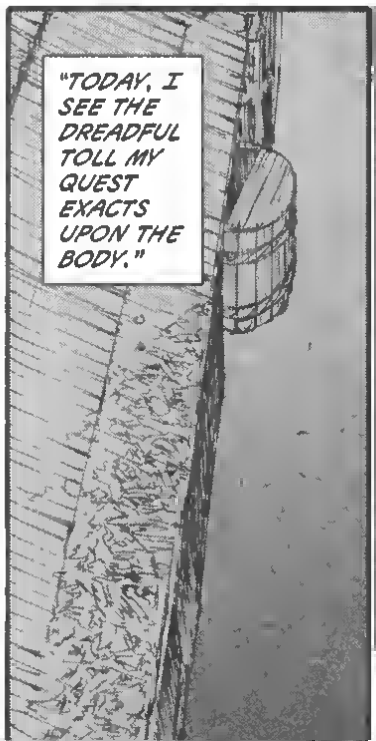
"MY SECRET FEAR IS REALIZED!
"RIGHT NOW, ALL FOUR LIMBS...
"...ARE INFUSED, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WITH MANJI'S IMMORTALITY.
"THEY'RE 'FOREIGN' TO HIS BODY.
"SUCH OVERWHELMING POWER...
"...HIS FLESH CAN'T STAND IT. IT'S... SCREAMING!"
O-KE!! WAKE UP TORAEMON!
I NEED STIMULANTS! HOT WATER! AND SUGAR!
SENSEI, IF THERE'S SUGAR, I COULD MAKE KUZUYU?
KUZUYU, AT A TIME LIKE--? OH! THAT'S GOOD.

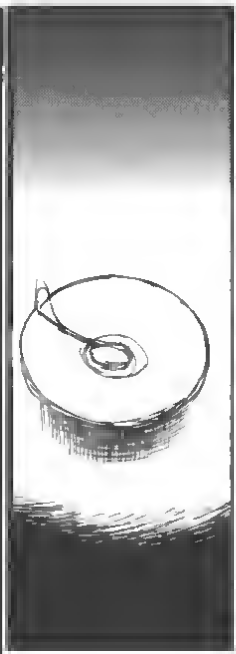
"TODAY, THE FIRST CLOUDS GATHER OVER MY EXPERIMENT. DEWANOSUKE'S FEVER, RAGGED BREATHING, AND WEAK PULSE PERSIST THROUGH THE MIDNIGHT HOURS..."
O-MITSU...
...O-MITSU...
?
COMIN' HOME... NOW....
OH... THAT'S HIS WIFE.
I'M SO JEAL-OUS.

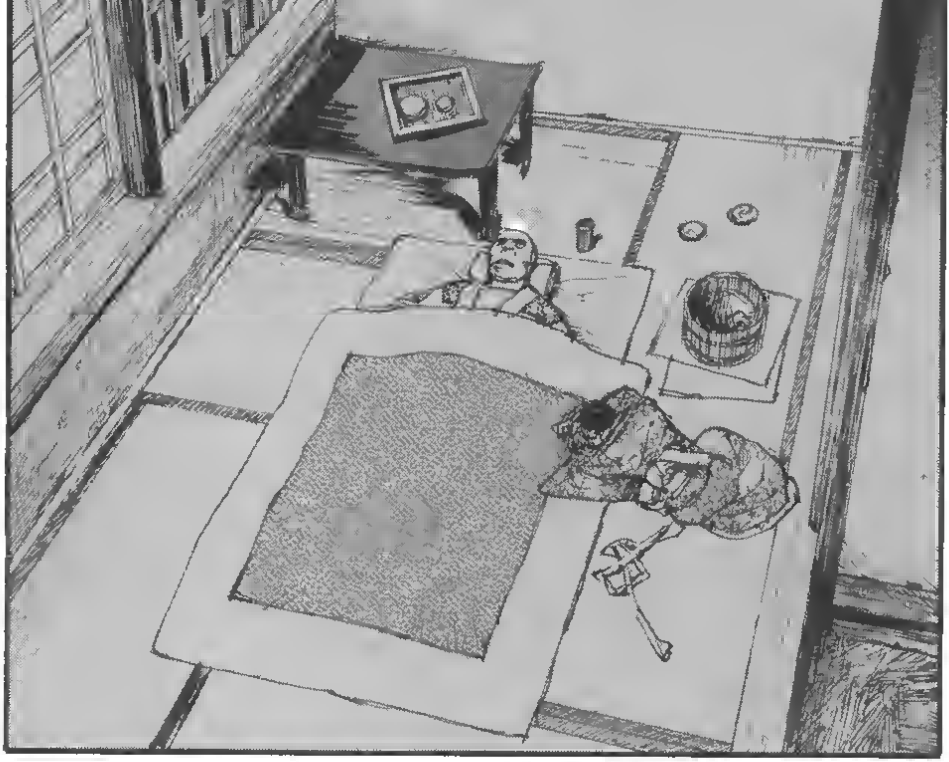
I... WON'T DIE...
WON'T DIE! FOREVER...

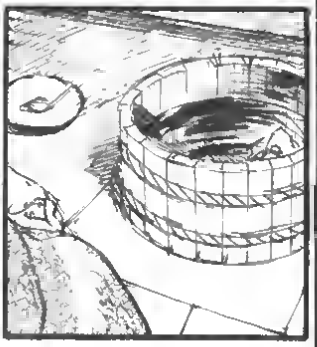
OF COURSE YOU WON'T!
YOU THINK I'D LET YOU DIE NOW?!

DAMN! WHAT A MESS!


"TODAY, I SEE THE DREADFUL TOLL MY QUEST EXACTS UPON THE BODY."





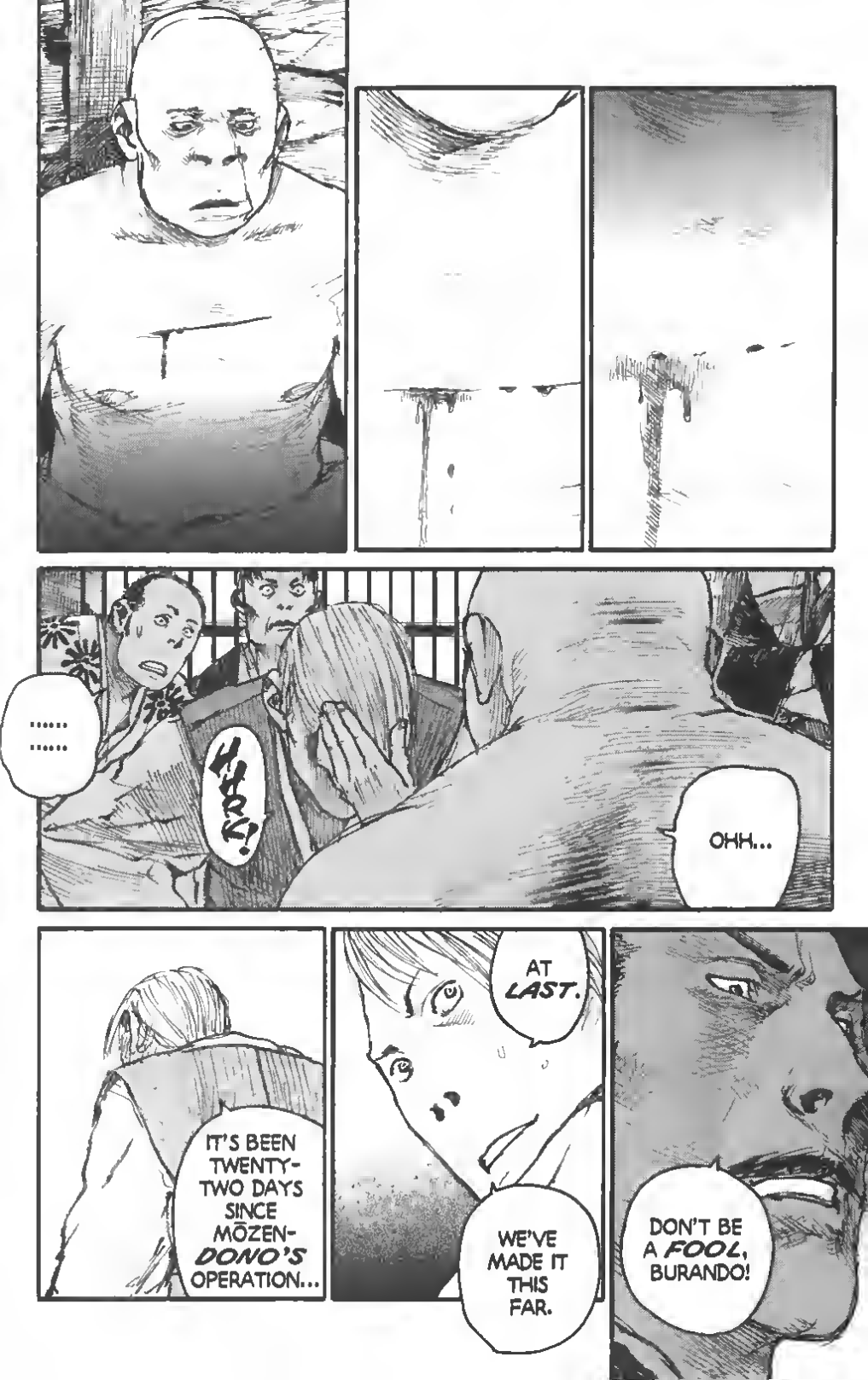


I HEAR HE WAS IN PERIL?
YES... RATHER.
BUT HE'S RECOVERED.

I RESTORED HIS LEFT ARM THE DAY BEFORE YESTER-DAY.
THAT COMPLETES MY SCHEDULE.
THEN, DEWA-NOSUKE...?
YES.
THEY'RE *BOTH* BACK TO THE BODIES THEY BROUGHT TO YOUR DUNGEON.

BEEN EATING RIGHT?
YOU LOST WEIGHT, DEWA.
.....
.....
.....

THE FINAL POLISH, DEWA-NOSUKE.


.....
.....
HRK!
OHH...
IT'S BEEN TWENTY-TWO DAYS SINCE MŌZEN-DONO'S OPERATION...
AT LAST.
WE'VE MADE IT THIS FAR.
DON'T BE A FOOL, BURANDO!

IMMOR-
TALITY.
IT
BOTH IS,
AND
ISN'T...
...ABOUT
HEALING
WOUNDS.
MUST
I BE THE
ONE TO
TEST IT
AGAIN?

NEXT MONTH:
ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY, Part 3 of 6

It's time for Manji's dimwitted-yet-likeable cellmate, Dewanosuke, to shine or *die*! Burando finally feels confident in his experiments and theories. However, Kagimura grows impatient and decides to "up the ante" in the tests on Dewanosuke's regenerative abilities. Also, remember how the *Ittō-ryū* warriors are supposed to be keeping a low profile? Well, one cute sparkplug is about to threaten everything. Yes, it's the return of Dōa! *Blade* fans have fallen in love with this feisty *Ittō-ryū* renegade. She's been causing so much trouble for Rin, but Dōa's headstrong attitude may soon turn up something very essential to Rin's search for her beloved, missing Manji.

GLOSSARY

Bangashira: Head of the *banshu*

Banshū: Officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts, here, a training center for swordsmanship

Dono: Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of higher rank

Edo: Capitol of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo

Ikidō: Live human torsos

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kaizō Shigi: Ayame Burando's journal

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Kuzuyu: Kudzu root broth

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ryū: A sword school

Tameshigiri: The test of a sword's cutting edge, usually on the body of a convict. *Kubikiri Asa* received payment for each *tameshigiri* and each sword appraisal he performed.

Yamada Asaemon: Nicknamed *Kubikiri Asa*, the Shogun's executioner was a master swordsman, sword tester, and an expert at beheading and cutting human bodies.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare" from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counter-clockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork. The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue. Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

LETTERS

Send letters and fan art to:

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS,
10956 SE MAIN STREET, MILWAUKIE, OREGON 97222

www.darkhorse.com • blade@darkhorse.com

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Dear *Blade of the Immortal*,

Samura's talent—how on earth can one person master so many variations of mood? Dark Horse could go so far as to remove every duel from the books, and I'd still find myself immersed in *Blade of the Immortal*. Many of the moments that make this tale so pervasively satisfying are the secondary stories and small flourishes. Go back to "Heart of Darkness," Part 4 and "Storm," Part 2, to the inn domestic's activities, her interactions with Rin, and all of the exquisite details: the food preparation, a wonderful two-page ballet of hands, the easings of mutual suspicion, etc.

Or, in "Autumn Frost," Part 1, the sly orchestration of Magatsu's association with Sori, an entertaining change-of-pace side story to Manji and Magatsu's partnership. Such complements to the main thread are sometimes themselves brilliantly underscored. One example seen in "Mirror of the Soul," Part 3, as Rin waits for Anotsu outside of Makie's hut, listening to the horrible screams coming from within with that bored look on her face and the shocking effect of a "what can you do?" powerlessness. Or the climax of Lord Shimada's cunning interrogation in "Cloudburst," Part 2, with Rin's sudden exposure of her scar to the shocked audience, her expression sadistic and gleefully triumphant.

Offering invaluable lessons in figurative movement and characterization, every monthly issue of *Blade of the Immortal* is a more effective learning tool than any one book specializing in expressive anatomy. There must be a way to jump ahead ten years and get one's mitts on the complete hardbound volume.

Jamie Umstattd
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Good to hear from you again, Jamie. I totally agree with you, and a good chunk of Samura fans probably do, too. I'd like to offer up two of my favorite "small flourishes." In the moments after Abayama finds out that O-Sei has hung herself in "Pity" (*BOTI* #103), Samura gives us a few silent panels on pages seven and eight as Abayama painfully digests this news, making his reluctant skewering of Makoto at the end of the chapter all the more poignant. Also, Gilchi's silent "Oh, God!" moment in "Confession" (*BOTI* #95), right after he finds out that his son has died, still blows me away. One panel with one eyeball barely visible under shades, and a tough-as-nails warrior becomes immediately vulnerable in a way he's never been before. Please send in your own favorite "small flourish" or single-panel moments.

By now, you've probably noticed the sweet Magatsu tribute on our back cover. Much love and thanks to Becky Cloonan, whose Demo comics have recently been collected into a primo trade. (So nice to hold! So fun to read!) Becky's also working on *American Virgin* and *East Coast Rising*, which should both be out by the time this issue hits the stands. Get more Becky news at www.estrigious.com/becky/.

See you next month, when Doa says, "When I was little, they stuck *Dtonpuikma* up my butt."

—Philip S.

Rin by Ivonne Falcón. Levittown, Puerto Rico

Philip Simon by Jhomar Soriano. Pasay City, Philippines

Magatsu

pinup by

Becky Cloonan

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